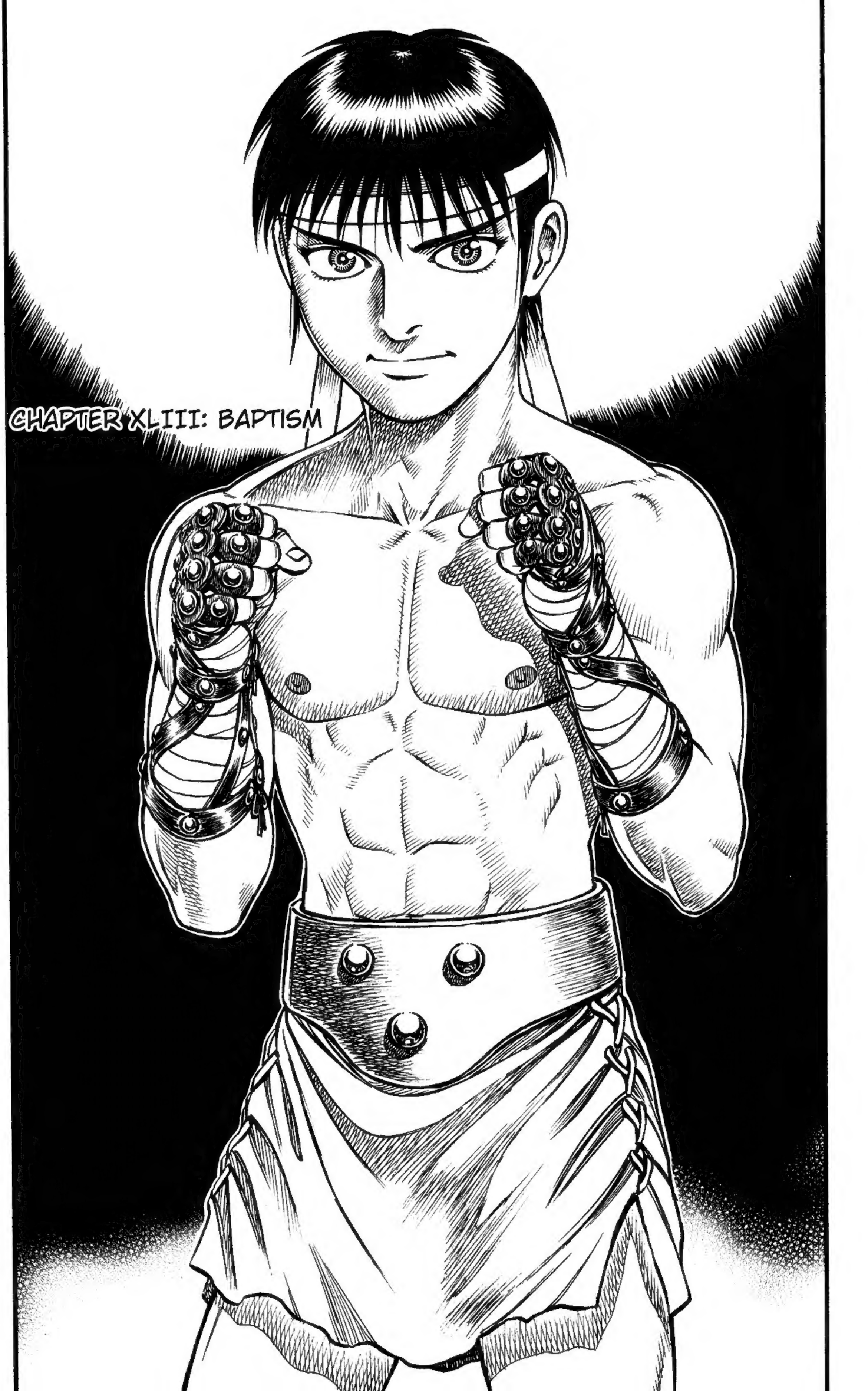
CHAPTER XLIII: BAPTISM



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THEIR SLAVE BOXER...

FROM DRISCO'S SLAVE BOXER TROUPE...

FIGHTERS, ENTER!

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I'M SORRY.

I GOT LOST AMONG THE PASSAGES...

OI OI. YOU'RE UP!

WHAT'RE YOU DOING MISS?!

HE'S A LIGHTNING QUICK NEWCOMER...

THE BOXING YOUTH CESTVS!

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I LAST FOUGHT IN AN ARENA.

THE TENSION IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT TO A FIGHT ON GRASS.

THEY CERTAINLY SEEM TO BE RILED UP.

HE SEEMS TO BE GETTING A CONSIDERABLE WELCOME.

WILL HE BE OKAY...?

FROM PROCULUS' BOXING SCHOOL...

AND HIS OPPONENT!

THEIR FIGHTER...

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A KNOWLEDGABLE, VALOROUS VETERAN!

HE'S A BOXER BY TRADE...

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THE BOXER WHO JUST WON'T GO DOWN!

ORLENTES OF CAPUA!

SO HE'S NOT A SLAVE?!

HE'S A PROFESSIONAL BOXER...?!

FIGHTERS TO THE CENTRE!

HE ALSO SEEMS TO BE A CROWD FAVOURITE.

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT HE'S A MIGHTY FIGHTER WITH BOTH EXPERIENCE AND CONFIDENCE.

SO THEN...

THOUGH HE WOULD'VE EARNED HIS FREEDOM, AND NOW USES HIS SKILLS IN THE WORLD OF FIGHTING...

MM, HE WAS PROBABLY A SLAVE ORIGINALLY.

MAS-TER...?

BRILLIANT-LY.

HE'LL WIN.

WE'VE NO HOPE FOR A WIN NOW!

THIS AIN'T NO GOOD.

DAMN IT, HE'S ENDED UP WITH A TERRIBLY STRONG FOE RIGHT FROM THE START!

BEGIN!

THE FORMER DOES NOT HAVE ANYTHING RESEMBLING A MODERN DAY WEIGHT OR ROUND SYSTEM.

PUGILISM AND BOXING INVOLVE TOTALLY DIFFERENT SETS OF FIGHTING SKILLS.

THERE IS NO TIME LIMIT, AND DECISION IS ONLY REACHED VIA KNOCKOUT. IT IS A CRUEL, RIGOROUS SHOWDOWN.

EACH FIGHTER WEARS HARDENED LEATHER GLOVES WITH NAILS IN...

WITH THE FIGHTS TAKING PLACE NOT IN A RING, BUT A ROPELESS ARENA.

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HE'S HUGE!

BEYOND JUST HIS APPEARANCE, I'M OVERWHELMED BY THE INTENSITY OF HIS FLESH!

TRADITIONAL BOXER.

THAT IS THE SHAPE OF A...

TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT HIS FORM.

SINCE HE WAS YOUNG HE'LL HAVE VIOLENTLY THROWN HIS WEIGHT AROUND, NEVER KNOWING DEFEAT.

HE'S THE TYPE WHO WILL NEVER HAVE LEARNT ANY FIGHTING TECHNIQUES. HE WINS VIA PHYSICAL ABILITY ALONE.

A DEEP CHEST, WIDE SHOULDERS, AND HUGE UPPER ARMS.

HE'S BEEN BLESSED FROM BIRTH WITH A STRONG, GIGANTIC FRAME.

HE'S ARROGANT WITH HIS LARGE BUILD.

EXPER-IENCE.

SUCH MEN GIVE YOU ALL SORTS OF TROUBLE WHEN YOU FIGHT THEM.

HOW CAN YOU KNOW ALL THAT FROM A MERE GLANCE?

HE'S SO FAST!

KUH!

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HMM, THAT ITCHED A BIT.

CAN'T YOU PUNCH PROPER KID?

NO MATTER WHERE I STRIKE HE BARELY NOTICES IT!

SO THICK, SO TOUGH, SO HEAVY!

IN A FIGHT THEY'LL RIGIDLY HARDEN THEIR FISTS...

IN ORDER TO INCREASE THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF EACH PUNCH.

TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT SUCH FOES?

NOT A LOT REAL-LY...

WELL...

...?

EVEN WHEN IT COMES TO CLOSE RANGE BLOWS, THEIR BULKY FRAMES MEAN THEY CAN EASILY WITHSTAND THEM.

THEY'VE NO FEAR OF FISTS TURNED INTO WEAPONS...

TO START WITH THEY'LL RARELY EVEN GET INTO CLOSE COMBAT...

AS IT'S OBVIOUS THEY HOLD AN ADVANTAGE AT RANGE WITH THEIR STRONG BLOWS.

THEY'RE GIANTS WHO ONLY ADVANCE TO THE NEXT ROUND BECAUSE OF THEIR ABUNDANCE OF PHYSICAL STRENGTH.

AT PRESENT THOSE WITH A MORE COMPREHENSIVE BUILD ARE WEEDED OUT.

RATHER THAN PRECISE, STRATEGIC PLAY, THEY DEMAND HEROIC, LARGE SCALE DISPLAYS...

SEEING SUCH FIGHTERS STOP AND SIMPLY SLUG IT OUT WITH EACH OTHER.

THOSE WHO COME TO ROME'S GREAT ARENA QUITE LIKE...

WE HAVE TO BREAK DOWN...

THAT IS THE COMPLETE FORM OF A TYPICAL FIGHTER.

THOSE ANCIENT TRADITIONS THEMSELVES!

HE JUST KEEPS PUSHING ON.

NO MATTER WHERE I STIKE HE DOESN'T EVEN FLINCH.

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MY FEET ARE PULLING BACK OF THEIR OWN ACCORD!

WHAT'S WITH THIS PHYSICAL PRESSURE?!

MY BODY'S FROZEN FROM THIS OPPRESSIVE FEELING!

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A HALF STEP?!

IT WOULD'VE BEEN A LOT WORSE HAD HE TAKEN ANOTHER HALF STEP IN.

IT WASN'T A DIRECT HIT. HIS UPPER BODY INSTANTLY CONTORTED, KILLING THE SHOCK.

MASTER!

HMPH.

IT'S LIKE I WAS HIT BY A BOULDER!

WHAT'S THIS?

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HE'D BEEN CRUSHED BY THE PRESSURE, AND TOOK THE BLOW WHILE PULLING BACK.

THIS IS A BAPTISM FROM A LONG SERVING VETERAN.

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AND SAFETY STANDARDS WERE NOWHERE NEAR EQUIVALENT TO THE MODERN DAY.

THERE WAS NO 10 COUNT RULE IN ANCIENT BOXING MATCHES.

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A MORE ASTONISHING FACT THOUGH...

WAS THAT THERE WAS NO PARTICULAR RULE AGAINST PURSUIT WHILE DOWN.

ENOUGH, ENOUGH, ORLENTES!

YOU SHOULDN'T UNDER-ESTIMATE...

YOUR OPPONENT WAS FAR TOO IMMATURE!

A BOXER, KID!

OKAY.

FIGHT GALLANTLY, THEN SCATTER!

NOW, BRING IT KID!

STOP RUNNING AROUND, FIGHT!

THIS AIN'T A GAME OF TAG BOY!

MY BODY'S NOT SO TIGHT NOW.

I'VE GOT THIS.

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HOW ELSE ARE YOU GONNA WIN?!

YEAH, THIS WAS TOTALLY UNFAIR!

HE NEVER STOOD A CHANCE AGAINST AN ADULT IN THE FIRST PLACE!

IT'S HOPE-LESS!

HIS OPPO-NENT'S EVIL!

CONTINUE!

IF YOU FEEL IT TO BE USELESS AND JUST GIVE UP YOU'LL NEVER ACHIEVE ANYTHING.

AT THE BARE MINIMUM, CONVENTIONS EXIST WITHIN A MATCH WHICH ALLOW FOR A CHANCE OF VICTORY.

TO START WITH, A BOXING FIGHT IS DIFFERENT TO A TOWN BRAWL.

BLESSED WITH A GIGANTIC FORM, HIS OPPONENT REMAINED AT EASE...

AND NEVER HELD ANY DESIRE TO IMPROVE HIS FIGHTING SKILLS!

IT'S ONLY WHEN DISADVANTAGED THAT ONE REFORMS AND PUTS EFFORT INTO FINDING NEW SKILLS.

INDEED, HE STILL HAS STRATEGY!

THAT WHICH WE STROVE SO HARD TO CREATE!

SHOW THEM CESTVS.

A FRAGMENT OF OUR UNFINISHED ART!

HERE I GO!